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ABSTRACT

The attitudes of Illinois public secondary school counselors and superintendents toward the study of foreign languages were examined. A total of 119 superintendents and 125 counselors responded to a five-point Likert questionnaire to gather data on perceptions of foreign languages and cultures. Results showed that most counselors and administrators disagreed with the idea that every student should be required to take a foreign language, although they thought that they should be encouraged. Superior grades should not be a prerequisite for taking foreign languages. Nearly three-fourths believed that school counselors should play an important role in encouraging students to study a foreign language. A large majority agreed that knowledge of foreign languages is more useful than ever and that such knowledge enriches appreciation of one's own culture. The majority also agreed that cultural understanding was the major reason for taking a foreign language. The counselors indicated a significantly more favorable attitude toward foreign language study than did the superintendents. However, superintendents did believe that foreign language study is a key contributor to the attainment of high priority educational goals. (RW)

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Attitudes of Secondary School Counselors and Superintendents Toward Foreign Language Study: A Descriptive Study

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Secondary school superintendents and high school counselors have a significant role in the selection and utilization of programs in the instructional curriculum. Their interests and attitudes toward various subject matter weigh heavily in the minds of students, professionals, and community members trying to plan the most beneficial educational experience for all concerned.

An understanding of the attitudes of counselors and superintendents toward the study of foreign languages could be the springboard that foreign language teachers use in long-range planning. As noted in the 1975 study conducted by Klayman,[1] the diversity of interests concerning foreign language study in the secondary schools contributes to the nebulous role of the discipline, not only in the secondary schools, but in the society in which we live.

The purpose of this study was to describe and compare the attitudes of counselors and superintendents, presently working in the public secondary schools in the state of Illinois, toward the study of foreign languages. Data was also gathered on the background of these two groups of educators in terms of degrees held, foreign study and travel experiences, age, and sex.

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Sample and Procedure

To ascertain information pertaining to the attitudes concerning the importance of foreign language study, the author random sampled 300 educators (150 superintendents and 150 guidance counselors) from the public high school districts and the upper division of the unit school districts (grades

9-12) in the state of Illinois. The educational districts used in the study encompassed both urban and suburban areas, they varied in size from large to small, and they represented the different geographical areas in the state of Illinois.

The two groups of educators were asked to respond to a five-point Likert questionnaire, developed by Coker,[2] to gather personal data and to ascertain their perceptions concerning foreign languages and cultures. The author received responses from 244 educators (81.33%). There was a return of 125 (83.33%) questionnaires from the counselors and a return of 119 (79.33%) questionnaires from the superintendents.

Data

In evaluating significant characteristics of the respondents we note that males (76.4%) and persons 31 years and above (96.7%) showed the highest representation in the total group. In each of the job-related settings (counselor-superintendent), respondents had a minimum of six years experience in the secondary schools. According to the survey, the Master's level was the minimum professional training of the respondents.

With regard to language study, nearly three-fourths (72.6%) of the population had studied a foreign language. Spanish was the language most studied by the group of educators, followed by Latin and French. Among those educators who had some language experience, the majority (75.4%) studied the language for a period of two years or less.

The following reports an item analysis of the responses of the counselors and superintendents significant to this study.

1. Every student should be required to study a foreign language at some time in his/her school life.

Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Agree	41.4%

Undecided	12.3%
Disagree	46.3%

2. School counselors should play a more important role in encouraging students to study a foreign language.

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Agree	73.0%
Undecided	13.9%
Disagree	13.1%

3. Every student should be encouraged to study a foreign language.

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Agree	59.8%
Undecided	9.9%
Disagree	30.3%

4. A knowledge of foreign language is more useful and necessary than it has ever been.

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Agree	80.7%
Undecided	10.7%
Disagree	8.6%

5. Foreign language study constitutes an indispensable element in a general education program.

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Agree	54.9%
Undecided	20.5%
Disagree	24.6%

6. The knowledge of other languages and cultures enriches one's appreciation of one's own culture and heritage.

Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Agree	90.9%
Undecided	6.6%
Disagree	2.5%

7. Only those students with superior grades (B or above) should be encouraged to study a foreign language.

Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Agree	9.0%
Undecided	13.5%
Disagree	77.5%

8. There are enough people in the world who speak English so that foreign language study is not really necessary.

Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Agree	2.9%
Undecided	9.8%
Disagree	87.3%

9. Most administrators are not too inclined toward expanding the language program in their institutions.

Responses	Percentage of Respondents
Agree	61.1%
Undecided	17.2%
Disagree	21.7%

10. The major justification for taking a foreign language is for:

a. travel

b. cultural understanding

c. use in careers

d. college entrance

e. discipline of mind

f. a broader education

g. self-improvement

h. communication, or

i. to improve English

The following are the top five justifications for language study as seen by the two groups of educators.

Response	Percentage of Respondents
1. cultural understanding	85.7%
2. broader education	85.3%
3. self-improvement	76.6%
4. communication	74.6%
5. use in careers	73.4%

The two independent sample t-test was selected to separately analyze the two groups of educators, counselors and administrators, regarding their attitudes toward the study of foreign languages (table 1).

Table 1

A COMPARISON OF COUNSELOR AND SUPERINTENDENT

ON THE LIKERT LANGUAGE ATTITUDE SCALE

Group	Sample Size	Mean	S.D.	t-statistic
Counselor	125	106.49	13.68	3.67
Superintendent	119	99.97	14.01	

t = 3.67, significant at the .001 level

The one-way ANOVA statistical method was used to compare the differences for the two groups of educators based upon the size of district the educator is employed (table 2). School district size is based upon secondary school student

enrollment.

Table 2

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SIZE OF DISTRICT AND EDUCATORS' ATTITUDE TOWARD FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Group	Sample Size	Mean	S.D.	F-statistic
Small (0-300)	83	102.27	14.13	
Medium (301-1000)	81	102.41	15.02	1.19
Large (1,000 & above)	80	105.31	13.33	

F-statistic, not significant at the .05 level

Analysis of Data

The author is cognizant of the fact that the participants in this study do not necessarily represent the opinions of all public secondary school counselors and superintendents in the state of Illinois; however, the responses received may be representative of the opinions of counselors and superintendents on a larger scale. A report of the findings reveals the following:

1. Questionnaire items that reflect the educators' attitude toward those who take a foreign language revealed that:
    a. most counselors and administrators disagree with the idea that every student should be "required" to take a foreign language; however,
    b. most educators agree that every student should be encouraged to take a foreign language;
    c. counselors and administrators both disagree with the notion that only those students with superior grades (B or better) should be encouraged to study a foreign language.

> These findings are consistent with Herron's Cogitations that educators support the view that all students, rather than the academically talented ones, be encouraged to study a foreign language.[3]

2. Nearly three-fourths (73.0%) of the participants agree that school counselors should play a more important role in encouraging students to study a foreign language.

3. A large majority (80.7%) of the educators agree that a knowledge of foreign languages is more useful and necessary than it ever had been.

4. Most of the educators (54.9%) agreed that foreign language study constitutes an indispensible element in a general education program.

5. Almost all of the counselors and superintendents (90.9%) agreed that the knowledge of other languages and cultures enriches one's appreciation of one's own culture and heritage.

6. Eighty-seven percent of the participants did not agree with the statement that there are enough people in the world who speak English so that foreign language study is not really necessary.

7. Most of the educators (61.1%) believe that most administrators are not too inclined toward expanding the language programs in their respective districts.

8. Concerning the questionnaire item that asked what are the values of taking a foreign language, counselors and superintendents indicated that cultural understanding was the major justification for taking a foreign language. These educators also believed that foreign language study is valuable for broadening one's education, for self-improvement, for communication, and for use in careers.

The findings support, in part, the results of Koppel's study which revealed that administrators do believe that foreign language study is

> a key contributor to the attainment of high priority educational goals, such as the development of positive attitudes toward learning, basic skills, pride, and cultural awareness and understanding.[4]

The findings also revealed that counselors exhibit a significantly more favorable attitude toward foreign language study than the superintendents.

The findings further revealed that educators of small, medium, and large school districts do not differ significantly in terms of their attitudes toward the study of foreign languages.

Conclusion

Foreign language instruction in the curriculum of the American secondary school has been seen, (1) as a viable tool that opens doors to communication among different cultures, (2) as an essential prerequisite for admission to some institutions of higher education, (3) as an ancillary tool that opens the doors to occupations outside the territorial limits of the United States, and (4) as an important experience for individuals interested in foreign travel.

The diversity of interests is important in one's understanding of the nebulous role, viewed by many counselors and superintendents, of the importance of foreign study in the secondary school and in this dynamic and pluralistic society in which we live today.

The diversity of interest is furthermore important in one's understanding of factors significant in deciding rather th enroll in foreign language study in the secondary school.

At all levels of learning, some administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, and students have been short-sighted and guilty of a simplistic view of the world that excluded the study of foreign language. In the past, a practical value of the study of foreign languages was not readily apparent in mass education as witnessed by the decline in foreign language study in the United States in the 1970's.

With this in mind, the future recruitment of foreign language students may be dependent upon other considerations than simply upon college admission requirements. These views are often dependent upon educators who are cognizant of the values and importance of foreign language study. The positive attitudes of all who play important roles in the education of American youth may be of great worth in improving foreign language programs.

The need for further study of the importance of foreign language study is evident. The literature is not voluminous in this area, and the results could be used to paint a more comprehensive picture of the perceptions of educators toward this discipline.

This study was limited to counselors and administrators responsible for the education of high school students in grades 9 through 12 in the public secondary and unit school districts in the state of Illinois. It is recommended that additional research be conducted to compare the attitudes of elementary, middle school, and junior high school administrators, counselors and teachers concerning the study of foreign languages.

Notes

[1]Norma E. Klayman, "Views of Secondary School Educators on Foreign Languages in Higher Education," The Modern Language Journal, 59 (1975), 169.

[2]Dolores M. Coker, "An Investigation of the Attitudes of Selected Secondary, Community College and University Administrators, Teachers, and Students Concerning the Importance of Foreign Language Study," Diss. East Texas State University, 1975.

[3]Carol Herron, "Who Should Study a Foreign Language? The Myth of Elitism," Foreign Language Annals, 15 (1982).

[4]Irene E. Koppel, "The Perceived Contribution of Foreign Language to High Priority Educational Goals," Foreign Language Annals, 15 (1982).